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ABSTRACT

America's lag behind many countries in foreign language training, particularly the Soviet Union, is examined from the viewpoint of her ever-increasing need for foreign language proficiency in many areas. Differences between domestic and foreign curriculums are considered and a proposal is made, based on the specific assumption that what is needed is a required foreign language program beginning in the elementary school. In addition, the author argues that the program must be continuous through graduation from high school in order to guarantee mastery of the target language. (GK)

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THE TEACHING OF RUSSIAN IN AMERICA: A MODEST PROPOSAL

by

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Knowing what happened to the statistics on Russian teaching when the first Soviet sputnik jolted America out of its complacency in 1957, I am almost certain that many of the college teachers of Russian sitting in this room today and at least 90 per cent of the high-school teachers were not teaching Russian five years ago. After all, in the fall of 1957 there were only 16 high schools in the United States where you could possibly have been teaching Russian. We all know what happened during the next two years. The number of high schools teaching Russian jumped from 16 to over 400, and the college enrollment in Russian rose in one year from 16,000 to more than 25,000.

Just to give you newcomers some idea of what the atmosphere was like before this foreign language revolution of the past five years, I can't resist telling you a true story of something that happened right here at Penn State back in 1951 or 1952, when both Stalin and McCarthy were still throwing their weight around and the presence of Russian teachers still tended to raise eyebrows rather than enrollments. I insist on the fact that this story actually happened, because I realize it does sound like fiction. During the Christmas holidays one of my students was hitch-hiking his way back to school, and during one hitch of his journey the man who gave him a ride began asking him the usual questions about his college work. Where was he studying? My student answered: "At Penn State." And what was he studying? My student answered: "I'm studying Russian. In fact, I'm a Russian major." The man almost stopped his car in astonishment and alarm. "Do you mean to say that you go to Penn State and you're in the Russian army?"

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There can scarcely be any doubt in anyone's mind that the dramatic rise in Russian enrollments between 1957 and 1959 can be traced directly to the first two Soviet sputniks and the effect they had on American public opinion about education. It doesn't matter that we have since discovered that Russian educators really aren't nine feet tall, and that the teaching of foreign languages in regular Soviet middle schools was possibly even worse than ours. The point is that the Soviet sputniks stirred us as a nation into a thoroughgoing re-examination of our schools, and set in motion a series of reforms, especially in science and foreign languages, that may well lead to a renaissance in the whole field of American public education.

What is less well known in America is the way in which our National Defense Education Act has very likely influenced in turn the teaching of foreign languages in the Soviet Union. On June 4, 1961, Pravda and

Izvestia published a decree of the USSR Council of Ministers "On Improving the Study of Foreign Languages." This Soviet decree is almost an answer point by point to the challenge of Title VI in our own National Defense Education Act. The Council of Ministers ordered that the ratio of foreign-language teachers to pupils be increased drastically. As fast as the supply of teachers makes it possible, all foreign-language classes of more than 25 pupils must be divided into two groups. Further, the Council of Ministers ordered--and I quote--"that an end be put to the practice of turning over foreign-language instruction to teachers of other subjects who have a poor command of the foreign language." These teachers must either be assigned to special courses to raise their qualifications or else be dismissed and given other jobs. A still more drastic measure gave the Ministry of Higher and Specialized Secondary Education two months to make changes in the university curriculums so that every graduate from a Soviet university should have a fluent command of a foreign language. Another provision of the decree specifies that sections of college courses preparing foreign-language teachers shall have no more than seven to ten students each, and that all other sections of college foreign-language courses shall be limited to no more than fifteen. Other provisions deal with the increased study of the less common languages, particularly those of Asia and Latin America; and the increased production of foreign-language records, films, dictionaries, phrase books, and reading materials. Finally, the most dramatic provision in the whole decree is one that has no counterpart in American education. The Council of Ministers gave the Soviet educational authorities five years in which to open "at least 700 additional general-education schools in which a number of subjects are taught in foreign languages." Note the word "additional." Last summer I talked with a number of parents in Kiev whose children were attending these special schools, where the study of the foreign language begins in the second grade and several subjects in the upper grades are taught in the foreign language itself. The schools are extremely popular with Soviet parents and children, and the demand for places in them greatly outruns the supply.

Mind you, I think there is a good deal of evidence that in most respects we know how to teach foreign languages more effectively than the Russians do. But the point is that, even with their less effective methods they are almost certain in the long run to get better results than we as long as we fail to take foreign languages as seriously as they do. Now, I invite you to think for a moment about this: it is an established fact psychologically that children are much more likely to acquire something really approaching native fluency in a foreign language if they learn it before the age of ten. What are the implications for international relations in the future of those hundreds of special Soviet schools in which Soviet children at the age of eight will start learning English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindustani, Arabic, Japanese, or any of dozens of other languages, and learn it so well that by the time they graduate they are studying perhaps half of their courses in that language?

Now let's take a look at just where we stand today as a nation in regard to foreign languages. Our position has been summed up in this way by my colleague at Indiana University, Professor William R. Parker, in the new third edition of his book The National Interest and

Foreign Languages: "Never have so many Americans encountered so much foreign speech with so little equipment for communication and so much depending upon communication"(p. 101). This year about one American out of every hundred will spend some time in a foreign country. Almost a million Americans in the armed forces are now stationed in countries around the world, learning in daily contact with dozens of foreign languages and cultures that public-school education is not practical unless it includes practical courses in foreign languages, and that life-adjustment programs are not really adequate unless they help Johnny make the adjustment to German or Spanish or Japanese or Korean. In 1959 the United States Passport Office issued more than 732,038 passports. In that same year Mexico issued tourist cards to 574,655 Americans who did not need passports to visit Mexico. During the academic year 1959-60, 15,306 American students studied abroad at 540 institutions in 63 countries, and during the following year more than two thousand Americans served as faculty members at universities in 92 foreign countries. During the year 1960-61 more than 53 thousand foreign students from 143 nations and territories studied at 1,666 American institutions, and formed the largest foreign student population to be found in any nation on earth. Would anybody now dare repeat the old argument that foreign-language study is not "practical"?

Not only are we Americans coming more and more into contact with other cultures and other languages both at home and abroad. We are also obliged, whether we like it or not, to play a role in international affairs that carries with it very heavy responsibilities. In order to fulfill these responsibilities we must build two-way channels of communication between ourselves and every important national group on earth. We must train specialists in anthropology, economics, government, history, and other disciplines who can interpret each of these national groups to us and help us talk to them. We must train linguists who can analyze and prepare teaching materials for scores of important languages. We must have large numbers of Americans with all kinds of skills, from agriculture and medicine to engineering and public administration, who combine with their specialty the kind of linguistic sophistication that will make it possible for them to work effectively on short-term projects in foreign countries. To support our response to all these international challenges there must be an educated and enlightened public opinion at home. The role of foreign-language study in creating this public attitude has perhaps never been stated more effectively than in May 1952 by the then United States Commissioner of Education, Earl J. McGrath. He said:

> "For some years I unwisely took the position that a foreign language did not constitute an indispensable element in a general educational program. This position, I am happy to say, I have reversed. I have now seen the light and I consider foreign languages a very important element in general education. . . . Only through the ability to use another language even modestly can one really become conscious of the full meaning of being a member of another nationality or cultural group. It is in our national interest to give as many of our citizens

> as possible the opportunity to gain these cultural insights. . . . Educators from the elementary school to the top levels of the university system ought to give immediate attention to this matter."

I will not stop here to dwell on the growing need for foreign-language competence among our scientists. The National Science Foundation has issued a pamphlet entitled Lost--One Third of the World's Scientific Literature, in which it points out that "nearly thirty percent of the world's scientific literature is produced in languages which are read by less than five per cent of U.S. scientists." In the chemical field alone more than 16 per cent of the world's scientific literature is now published in Russian, which can be read by only two per cent of American scientists. A growing body of scientific literature--already more than six per cent of the world output--is now published in Japanese, which can be read by only one half of one per cent of American scientists. We can only guess at what our needs may be twenty years from now in Chinese.

This is the challenge we face today. How well prepared are we to meet it?

First of all, it seems clear to me that American public opinion is running far ahead of educational administrators, and probably ahead of most American foreign-language teachers. A recent Gallup poll revealed that 84 per cent of Americans now support the idea of requiring all school children to learn a second language. In California, the very state which only eleven years ago prohibited any foreign-language requirement for graduation from the state colleges, a law was passed by the legislature in 1961 that will require all pupils in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades to study a foreign language, beginning in September 1965.

Statistics show that the tide has turned in the decline of foreign-language study that set in after World War I. Even as late as 1952, high-school enrollments in foreign languages were still dropping, but by 1959 the number of high-school students in foreign-language courses had jumped to 19.1 per cent of the total high-school enrollment, and college foreign-language enrollments were growing three times as fast as the total college population. Since 1953 at least 42 colleges and universities have restored or instituted a foreign-language requirement for graduation. In its first three years of operation the National Defense Education Act has devoted more than $28 million through Title VI along to the strengthening of foreign-language teaching, and the effects of this program can be seen at every level of our educational process. So much is happening that one hears reference more and more frequently to a new Renaissance in foreign-language study in America.

But let's make sure that we see all this in perspective. As Professor Parker has pointed out in his new book, even today the proportion of high-school pupils studying a modern foreign language--19.1 per cent in 1959--has not yet caught up with the 19.5 per cent in 1934, when foreign-language teachers were calling the situation desperate. To be sure, we have reason to be encouraged today because the trend is up rather than down; but we are still a long, long way from regaining the ground that has been

lost since 1915, when 35.9 per cent of all the high-school pupils in America were studying a modern foreign language and 37.3 per cent were studying Latin.

And how do we stand today in comparison with other countries? Let me start with a quotation from Komsomol'skaia pravda on May 13, 1958: "The Soviet Union's international ties are broadening, and our lag in the study of foreign languages is becoming more and more intolerable." This statement was made at a time when an estimated 12,000,000 Soviet boys and girls were enrolled in foreign-language classes that form part of the six-year compulsory foreign-language program of Soviet schools.

To the best of my knowledge there is no important nation on earth except our own where so little time is allotted to the study of foreign languages. The minimum in almost every other country in the world is four years, and eight to ten years are not uncommon. In West Germany, the 20 to 30 per cent of school children who prepare for university work in secondary school must all study one foreign language for nine years and a second one for six. Even among students who are not preparing for the university about 60 per cent study some foreign language. In Sweden all students who complete grade 12 or 13 have had 8 years of English, 6 of German, and 5 of French. I could go on and on, but the statistics would become monotonous, because everybody is more or less in step but America. Fewer than one fourth of our high-school students who finished the second year of a modern language in 1958 went on to the third year in 1959. In seven states they could not possibly have gone on, because those states did not offer a single third-year course in any modern foreign language in a single public high school. At least eleven more states did not offer a single fourth-year course.

All this makes it perfectly clear how the legend got started that Europeans have some kind of mystical gift for learning foreign languages: they simply begin their study of foreign languages several years earlier than we do, they continue it several years longer, and they are not taught by basketball coaches and biology teachers whose school principal happened to discover that they had somewhere accumulated eighteen semester hours of Spanish.

It seems obvious that if we are to prepare ourselves educationally to meet the challenge of our times, we must set our sights far higher in foreign-language study than we have ever set them before. This leads me to the modest proposal that I should like to present today. It is based on the following well-founded assumptions:

(1) The experience of learning to communicate in a foreign language is an essential part of general education. No other experience can serve as a substitute for it in liberating the intellect from blind dependence on a single system of communication and in opening the way to a genuine appreciation of cultural differences. No one whose education has not included this experience is capable of judging the value of foreign-language study in education.

(2) The earlier a child begins learning a foreign language, the more easily he will learn it and the better he will speak it.

(3) Learning one foreign language makes it easier to learn a second, and that in turn makes it easier to learn a third.

My modest proposal grows out of the enormity and complexity of our national need for language competence. At any given moment a great variety of languages may need to be matched with an even great variety of occupational skills. How can a future engineer in the sophomore class at the Altoona High School foretell that he will need both engineering and Gujerati fifteen years from now? How can a high-school girl in Shamokin who wants to become a trained nurse know in advance whether she may be invited in 1970 to teaching nursing to Spanish-speaking girls in Bolivia or to Swahili-speaking girls in Africa? The answer, of course, is that they cannot know in advance. What we must do is give our future engineers and nurses the kind of education that will enable them to get a working knowledge quickly of whatever language the circumstances may require. I don't have to tell you, who already know a foreign language, that this is not nearly so hard as most monolingual persons imagine. If you have learned to think, however haltingly, in one or two foreign languages, you will be able to start thinking in a new one almost from the time you learn your first twenty words.

And so my modest proposal is simply that all the colleges and universities in the United States immediately work out a series of measures to lead step by step toward an admission requirement of real fluency in at least one foreign language, and preferably two.

Now let us examine the implications of this proposal. Why, it may be asked, should we shift the main burden of foreign-language teaching from the colleges to the grade schools? The answer is, first, because the experience of learning a foreign language should be a part of every child's education, whether he goes to college later or not; second, because the proper time psychologically and physiologically to start learning a second language is in childhood, not in college; third, because there is more time available for learning a second language in kindergarten and elementary school than in high school, more time in high school than in college, and more time in college than in graduate school; and fourth, because learning one or two foreign languages before college will make it possible for college students to spend their time on real college work: instead of learning a second language in college they will use a second language, and hopefully a third, as tools in all their college courses.

As for the college language departments, instead of spending most of their time teaching first- and second-year French or German or Russian to freshmen and sophomores, they will spend most of their time preparing highly qualified teachers of foreign languages: some for kindergarten and elementary school (where no one will be allowed to teach who has not acquired an almost native accent); others for junior and senior high school (where some of the most outstanding teachers

will combine language preparation with another subject so as to teach a few courses, such as history or the sciences, in the language itself); and of course still others, as at present, for teaching and research in college and graduate school.

Let us take a close look at some of the consequences of this proposal. Future Ph.D. candidates in Russian literature would enter college as freshmen already speaking two of the languages they would need in graduate work, perhaps Russian and French; and their experience in learning those two languages would enable them to acquire German very rapidly in a college course geared to their linguistic sophistication. By the time they graduated they would not only be solidly prepared in Russian language and literature, they would also have had time to get well acquainted with English, French, and German literatures, all of which are essential to a proper understanding of Russian literary history.

The undergraduate major in English, thanks to his previous foreign-language study, would come to see English literature in better perspective by getting acquainted also with one or two other literatures. Future teachers of foreign languages in elementary school or high school would be real specialists in one language, but they would each have a better understanding of their own language specialty and a better appreciation of their school's total foreign-language program because they would also know a second or third foreign language.

With this common preparation in foreign languages at the time they enter college, both English majors and future teachers of foreign languages would have room in their undergraduate programs for at least some training in the teaching of English as a foreign language. This would give both groups an opportunity to broaden their experience with occasional periods of teaching in other countries. For the foreign-language teachers this would presumably take place in the country whose language they taught in America. You can get some idea of the enormous possibilities in this exciting field from the prediction made last December in Chicago by Professor J. Milton Cowan, of Cornell University, that there would be a need twenty years from now for two million teachers of English throughout the world. (Just today I heard an unconfirmed report that the government of Ghana is now getting teachers of English from Yugoslavia!)

One further consequence of my modest proposal is that the colleges and universities, once they had passed the main burden of second-language teaching down to the grade schools, would be free to devote more attention to the scores of important languages that are now rarely taught anywhere. And the students who studied these less commonly taught languages would make faster progress because they would all have to come to college with a good linguistic background.

Now, let us examine the consequences of this modest proposal for education below the college level. The ideal foreign-language program would begin in kindergarten. Even before he had started learning to read his native English, each American child would start learning a foreign language audio-lingually, acquiring the structural patterns of even a difficult language without realizing it was difficult. The teacher, of course, would be a specialist in that language alone, and

would come into the kindergarten each day especially for the short language lesson. This point is crucially important for two reasons. First, the imitative ability of small children makes it essential that no one be allowed to teach them a foreign language whose accent is not practically indistinguishable from that of a native. Second, it is equally essential that the child associate his native language and the foreign language with the different persons. The notion still advocated by some professional educators that FLES programs should be taught by the regular classroom teacher is so unsound psychologically that I find it hard to see how anybody who knew either psychology or a foreign language could ever have considered it seriously. It reminds me of the story they tell around my alma mater about the teacher of French and German who decided to give her first child the benefit of all three of her languages. And so she spoke to her baby son one day in English, the next in French, the third in German, and the fourth in English again; and the boy grew and grew, and the years passed, and he didn't speak anything. Finally she took him to a psychiatrist, and he told her the boy was simply mixed up: he associated all three languages with the same person! On the other hand, I have a friend who was born in Petersburg before the Soviet revolution and had learned five languages by the time she was five years old. She had learned each one purely audio-lingually from a separate tutor or governess.

In our ideal program Johnny and Mary will learn to speak a foreign language while they are learning to read their native English. Not until perhaps the fourth grade, when their reading habits in English are well established, will they see any written materials in the foreign language. In this way their mastery of the foreign language will neither influence nor be influenced by their learning to read and write their native English.

The foreign-language study that begins in kindergarten will be part of an articulated program continuing through grade 12; but beginning in junior high school, when children's growing analytical ability overtakes their diminishing imitative ability, appropriate adjustments will need to be made in the teaching techniques used in their foreign-language classes; and a few of the least gifted pupils may be advised at this time to drop their foreign-language study. By this time they will all have had the exciting and stimulating experience of exploring another linguistic world, and through it another culture. Regardless of whether or not they continue the study of a foreign language, this experience will undoubtedly influence their attitude toward their own language and culture and toward the rest of the world as long as they live. They will have been liberated from the intellectual fetters of monolingualism.

All the college-bound students will be expected to continue their foreign-language sequence through the twelfth grade, and most of them will be expected to begin a second foreign language in junior high school. The students with a real gift for languages will be encouraged to start a third one in grade nine or ten. No doubt many of these students will be interested at this point in choosing Latin. With its demands upon the analytical power of the learner, Latin is admirably suited for study in high school after a student has begun learning one or two modern languages audio-lingually.

Now, I foresee one practical objection to this part of my modest proposal. How do I imagine, from the cloudy heights of my ivory tower, that the high-school curriculum could possibly be stretched enough to make room for the study of three foreign languages? Well, I don't have to imagine it, because it has already been done. The Connecticut State Board of Education has published a model curriculum showing just how it is possible to fit three languages into an elementary and high-school program without leaving out anything essential.

By the time the student has progressed from kindergarten through the eighth grade in one foreign language our best high schools should give him an opportunity to take certain high-school courses, such as history or a science, in the foreign language itself. A science course would be particularly well suited to being taught in Russian or German, because these are the two most important languages today for our scientists, and also because Soviet textbooks in science or mathematics could be used without presenting any serious problem of ideological bias. Indeed, you may have read the news recently that a series of Russian books in mathematics for teen-agers have just been published in English translation for American students because we have nothing like them in America. One word of caution, though, is necessary at this point. Nobody should be allowed to teach another subject in a foreign language who is not perfectly at home in the language and adequately qualified in the subject.

So there you have my modest proposal, a proposal that we simply start catching up with the rest of the world in our study of foreign languages.

But we are so far behind the rest of the world today that we cannot hope to catch up in one great leap, and so I must now present some more proposals--equally modest, of course--for a step-by-step program of catching up.

Here again I should like to start with some basic axioms:

(1) The key to the solution of all our foreign-language problems lies in the elementary school. To let a child go past the age of ten without beginning his first foreign language is like starting to train Olympic athletes at the age of 30. Whatever they accomplish will be remarkable, considering their age; but why give them such a handicap?

(2) No foreign language should be offered in any elementary school unless three conditions exist:

(a) a teacher must be available who has a practically native accent;
(b) the approach to the language must be purely audio-lingual;
(c) the language course must be part of a systematic and uninterrupted program extending to the end of high school.

Now, keeping these two axioms in mind, where do we start on our way to utopia?

The first step I suggest is that every college and university immediately announce a date after which it will require at least two years of high-school study in one foreign language for entrance and will give no credit for the first year of college foreign language to students not meeting the entrance requirement. This first step is so modest that I almost feel apologetic for proposing it. It would not begin to bring us up to the level of other civilized countries. What is more, it would present no radical departure from the trend that is already under way. Between 1957 and 1960, at least 22 colleges offering the B.A. degree adopted a foreign-language entrance requirement and four more strengthened the requirement they already had, while only five colleges dropped their requirement during that period. The 3500 member institutions of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges have now voted by a 90-per-cent majority to require at least two years of foreign-language instruction beginning in 1963. In 1959 the high-school foreign-language enrollment was increasing six times as fast as the total high-school enrollment. Now that the high-school foreign-language enrollments are rising so dramatically, the colleges by and large have not yet realized that the time is ripe to encourage this trend in the high schools by again requiring a foreign language for college entrance. Statistics show that there are 21 states in which the percentage of high school offering a foreign language is distinctly higher than the percentage of colleges requiring it for admission.

Step Number One should be considered only a temporary measure, and ideally it ought to be announced as part of a series of steps over a period of perhaps ten years that would bring the college entrance requirement up to four years in one foreign language. Teaching only two years of a foreign language in high school is like teaching elementary-school children only the first half of the alphabet. It's a good way to prove that no child can learn to read and write in school! When somebody asked Dr. James B. Conant in 1960 about two years of foreign language in high school, he exclaimed: "A two-year course? They might as well play basketball."

What makes the two-year course even worse is that it usually comes during the first two years of high school. This leaves a two-year gap between a student's foreign-language study in high school and in college. The best way to fill this gap, as I have said already, is to encourage, and finally require, all college-bound students to study the language for two more years. Meanwhile, let us encourage our colleges to set up special foreign-language refresher courses for high-school graduates in the summer before they enter as freshmen.

Another transitional step the colleges can take to encourage third- and fourth-year foreign-language study in high school is to give advanced-standing credit for it. This would offer a double benefit: by continuing his foreign-language study in grades 11 and 12 the student would keep from getting rusty and at the same time would earn credit for second-year college language study.

And now for Step Number Two. This step would simply call for using all suitable means to extend foreign-language study in high school from two years to four--all in the same language, of course. The liberal-arts colleges can help by gradually raising their foreign-language entrance requirements from two years to three, and then from three to four. The institutions offering the B.S. degree can help by recognizing that foreign languages today are just as important in technical training, which their students may be called upon to use anywhere in the world, as they are for the liberal arts. The schools of education in particular can help by freeing themselves still more rapidly from that curious prejudice against foreign languages which has so long been reflected in their policies. The widespread existence of this prejudice until recently is of course unquestionable. One needs only to cite such actions as the 1951 ruling of the California State Board of Education stating that "no foreign language shall be required by a state college as a condition to graduation." Until it was later modified, this ruling actually meant that no major in Spanish at a California state college could be required to take Spanish! Or, to give another example, there is the school of education, which mercifully shall be nameless, where Requirement Number 6 for the Master of Science in Education still reads, word for word, as follows: "You are not required to take a foreign language."

But let us not linger over the mistakes of the past. With a new generation of professional educators moving into positions of leadership, many of whom know the importance of foreign languages from first-hand experience abroad, this old prejudice is fast disappearing. I see evidence all around us of the dawn of a new era of mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between leaders in professional education and specialists in foreign languages. It would be hard to imagine a more convincing argument anywhere about the importance of foreign languages in secondary education than the policy statement issued on May 7, 1959, by the National Association of Secondary-School Principals. If any of you haven't got a copy of that in your files, you ought to be sure to get one and keep it handy. Its title is Modern Foreign Languages in the Comprehensive Secondary School, and you can get it, as I recall, for 15 cents, from the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

This excellent document quotes with approval the following statement by Dr. James B. Conant in his study of American high schools.

> Unless a person has acquired something approaching mastery of one foreign language, he has missed an educational experience of the first importance. Such people never know another language. They either think that acquiring mastery is an impossible hurdle to surmount, or else they believe that the ability to understand and speak a few words, perhaps enough to order a meal in a hotel, is a working knowledge. In short, a door is closed to them forever.

Now listen to what the high-school principals have to say about going beyond the two-year language program:

> Acquiring a proficiency in modern foreign language requires a longer sequence than the two years of modern language study now offered in many schools. A three-year sequence can hardly be expected to produce adequate results. But if this is the most a school can offer, we suggest that a three-year sequence for all students electing a modern foreign language should be offered in grades 10, 11, and 12.
>
> We earnestly recommend that a minimum of four years of sequential study of modern foreign language be available to students, as long as such study is profitable to them, even though classes may be small or individual study and practice may be necessary.
>
> In small schools, we believe it is better to concentrate on a three- or four-year sequence in a single language rather than on a shorter sequence in more than one. . . .
>
> We recommend that students exceptionally proficient in language be encouraged by principals and counselors to elect the study of a second modern foreign language whenever possible while continuing the first.

The principals further recommend that schools make an effort to set up a six-year sequence beginning in grade 7, and they suggest that large schools consider the possibility of supporting a program in some Asian or less commonly taught European language in addition to French, German, and Spanish. They specifically recommend consideration of Russian, saying that "the study of Russian may be as urgent as the study of any Western European language." Regardless of the languages taught, however, the principals urge that teachers be employed who speak fluently the language they teach, and that the modern audio-lingual approach be used in the classroom.

Two questions about Step Number Two, the transition to a four-year program, still need answering. One is, Where do we find the teachers? And the other is, How do we encourage our pupils to continue studying their language beyond the second year? I believe the answers to these two questions are related. It has been my observation that real progress in learning to speak a foreign language creates its own justification, and almost automatically leads to a desire to learn more. As fast as our present teachers increase their own facility in their foreign language and gain skill in using the new teaching methods, the demand will grow among their pupils for a third and fourth year of study. And if any of you have trouble getting your principal and your school boards to provide money for a full-scale program, I might pass on to you the story of what one teacher of Russian did in Canton, Illinois. Wayne H. Fisher had gone to an NDEA Institute and gotten interested in the new audio-lingual approach to language learning, and when he applied it the next year in his classes the response from his pupils was tremendous. Toward the end of the year he was invited to give a talk about the new approach to foreign-language teaching before the local citizens' advisory committee to the public schools. Instead of giving them a formal talk he simply taught them Lesson One of his Russian course. By the end of

the hour they were all speaking a few phrases of Russian, they had personally experienced the new approach to language-learning, and they were enthusiastic supporters of his program.*

Now, the place where we need to concentrate our recruiting of foreign-language teachers for elementary and high schools is right in high-school foreign-language classes. What imaginative steps can we take to get high-school students excited about this kind of a career? Part of the answer, of course, lies in the hands of the school boards and the communities they represent. In the long run a community will get the kind of public-school teaching it deserves--in other words, the kind it is willing to pay for. But there are other ways as well to recruit new teachers. For example, in the State of Indiana we are now engaged, with the help of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, in a kind of pilot project that promises both to encourage the development of four-year foreign-language sequences and to interest high-school students of foreign languages in becoming high-school teachers. This spring 90 high-school students in third-year foreign-language courses--30 each in French, German, and Spanish--were selected in a state wide competition for a summer language program to be conducted in France, Germany, and Mexico by the three most highly qualified native American teachers of the three languages who could be found. The students will live in private homes and spend a summer of rigorous foreign-language study in the country where the language is spoken. The competition for places in the program is open only to students below grade 12 in third-year language classes, and in schools that promise to have an appropriate fourth-year course available for them when they return in the fall.

A number of Indiana high schools have already begun expanding their foreign-language curriculums in order to become eligible for participation in this program. I leave it to you to guess at how many of the participants may catch a new vision of what the role of the high-school foreign-language teacher can be.

Unfortunately, this kind of program is not possible--at least at present--for our high-school students of Russian. A kind of equivalent exists for students at the college level and beyond in the summer Russian Language Study Tours conducted by Indiana University. As many of you know, each summer we select a number of undergraduate and graduate students as well as high-school and college teachers who have had at least two years of college Russian and give them an intensive five-week Russian course at Indiana University and five weeks of language practice in the Soviet Union, where they travel in groups of 20 under the direction of our own tour leaders. While this arrangement is of course not nearly so satisfactory as the freer overseas language programs that can be worked out in noncommunist countries, the total experience, with its compulsory pledge to speak only Russian throughout the stay in the Soviet Union, has proved its value in a

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* This footnote shows what can happen to skillful and imaginative foreign-language teachers: Wayne Fisher is now on the faculty of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Chicago.

number of ways. One is the difference in scores that the participants have made on the MLA proficiency tests at the beginning and the end of the ten-week program. The forty high-school teachers of Russian who took part last summer have commented in particular on the greater self-confidence they now have in their Russian classrooms as a result of this experience.

The question has been raised with us by one public-school system about the feasibility of a similar program for high-school students. Knowing the complexities involved, I believe it is still premature to undertake this program with high-school students, but we are continuing to explore the idea.

I have one more proposal to make for encouraging the transition to four-year curriculums in high school. Unfortunately, this proposal too would not be feasible at present in Russian. I should like to see the various AAT groups--the American Association of Teachers of French, and German, and Italian, and Spanish--organize the kind of assistant-ship program that I benefited from in a previous incarnation, twenty-five years ago, when I was a teacher of French. I should like to see the best high schools across the country given an opportunity to invite a young Frenchman, or German, or Italian, or Latin American who is preparing to become a teacher of English, to spend a year in America as an assistant to their regular teacher of his language. Funds to cover his travel expenses might very well come from the new Fulbright-Hayes Bill. Each host high school should be required to meet certain conditions in order to be eligible for an assistant. If the appropriate AAT organization managed the affair, I should think it might very well require that the school have a four-year program in the language; that the school board or the community provide sufficient funds to cover the assistant's living expenses; and that a committee be set up in the community, perhaps by the Parent-Teacher Association, to assure that the young native assistant would be well received and have the kind of year that would make him go back home interested in furthering mutual understanding between our two countries. The assistant would not be put in full charge of any course, but he could conduct conversation classes with the more advanced students under the supervision of the American teacher. There are many communities all over the country where such an assistant might well be the first native Frenchman or German or Latin American the high-school students had ever met.

That is enough about Step Number Two, the transition to a four-year foreign-language curriculum in high school. Now we come to Step Number Three, the biggest step of all. The other two steps were easy. This one is hard, and drastic, and more important than anything else we can do. Step Number Three involves extending the foreign-language program all the way down from high school to grade 3, and then to grade 1, and finally to kindergarten. Like certain other jobs, such as well-digging and deep-sea diving, this is one in which we should begin at the top and work down. It does more harm than good to start a foreign-language program somewhere down in the grades and then either drop it before junior high or arrange for no articulation between it and the foreign-language courses in secondary school.

Of all the paradoxes in American Education today there is probably none that surpasses the present state of FLES--of foreign languages in elementary schools. Everything we know about the nature of language and language-learning makes it perfectly clear that the proper time to learn a foreign language is in early childhood, preferably before school age but certainly before the age of ten. The public support for FLES programs is more enthusiastic than for foreign-language study at any other point in our educational system. The key to all our problems of foreign-language teaching is to be found in what we do with the years from kindergarten to grade 8. And yet when we look at FLES today what do we see?

In 1959 more than 1,200,000 children from kindergarten to grade eight were taking part in some sort of FLES program; and from everything I have been able to find out about what these children were learning, most of them were wasting their time.

During the year 1960-61 two experienced FLES teachers Nancy V. Alkonis and Mary A. Brophy, made a study of FLES programs in sixty-two school systems in twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia. The sad story of what they found is set forth in their article, "A Survey of FLES Practices," published by the Modern Language Association in the big new volume, Reports of Surveys and Studies in the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages.* Their conclusion is that satisfactory FLES programs exist in fewer than ten of these sixty-two school systems. When you read the details of what they found, you are tempted to wonder whether it did not take real genius to think up so many wrong ways of teaching foreign languages. For example, in several school systems the two investigators were told that the elementary school did not concern itself with pronunciation, because that was the job of the high schools and colleges. Some systems thought the main part of language-learning was the acquisition of vocabulary, and the children spent months learning hundreds of isolated words. In most of the schools the authors visited, FLES was considered merely a prelude to "real" language learning, which was believed to begin only in high school. A widespread attitude among school administrators, they found, was that teachers needed very little knowledge of the language in order to teach it in elementary school; and many FLES programs were staffed by regular elementary-school classroom teachers, the great majority of whom had had no foreign-language background at all. The principal factors in choosing FLES teachers often seemed to be mere enthusiasm rather than competence in foreign-language teaching. In fact, a prevalent idea, believe it or not, seemed to be that the teacher could learn along with the children! The authors properly ask how many of these same teachers and administrators would consider having the children taught to play the piano by someone who had no knowledge of music and was learning along with his pupils. The general impression one gets is that the majority of FLES programs now operating are conducted unsystematically, with little real content, and are taught by enthusiastic teachers who are for the most part appallingly ignorant of the language they are teaching, the nature of language in

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* Reports of Surveys and Studies in the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages by the Modern Language Association of America, 1959-61, New York, pp. 213-217.

general, and the psychology of language-learning. The few good programs the authors found not only showed what can be achieved when FLES is handled properly but also emphasized by contrast just how bad most of the FLES programs are.

One conclusion not to be drawn from all this is that, since most FLES programs are so bad, we ought to give up the whole idea and leave foreign languages to the high schools and colleges. To do this would be to doom ourselves never to achieve really satisfactory results in foreign-language teaching. What we must do instead is determine what conditions are required in order to make FLES teaching effective and then set about creating these conditions as rapidly as possible. We already know what most of them are. The first and most important is the recognition that the level of competence in speaking the foreign language should be even higher for FLES teachers than for foreign-language teachers in high school and college. In saying this I don't intend to provide high school teachers or college professors with an excuse for aiming at anything lower than perfection. I merely want to emphasize the enormous responsibility and opportunity that are presented by children still young enough to imitate a foreign language perfectly.

Along with having reasonable fluency and an almost native accent, the FLES teacher must be skilled in using the modern audio-lingual methods of foreign-language teaching. For the sake of argument I might grant that we could at least argue over these methods at the high-school and college level, but in elementary school there cannot be any argument at all. Either we take advantage of the elementary-school child's plasticity of mind, his imitative ability, and his freedom from inhibitions, and we systematically create within him the phonological and grammatical habits that constitute speaking a language, or else we are wasting the child's time and his parents' money. We must get rid of the notion that foreign languages in elementary school are a kind of linguistically unimportant child's play designed only to arouse the pupil's interest in the real thing in high school. Foreign languages in elementary school are a serious business. We must get into this business as rapidly as possible, but I suggest that we stay out of it entirely rather than rushing into it poorly prepared.

I am inclined to suspect that more knowledge is available today in the United States about the nature of language and about truly effective methods of language-learning than in any other country in the world. But unfortunately, this body of knowledge, and skill in using these revolutionary new methods, are still almost unknown to the great majority of American teachers of foreign languages. Just to give one example, we teachers of Russian talk about our problems and go about our jobs as if we had never heard of all the work that has been done on these same problems by the leading teachers of French and Spanish. Perhaps we really haven't!

How can we bring all this new knowledge to bear on the problem of foreign languages in elementary schools?

What we need above all is ways of demonstrating how effective this new knowledge is and how it can be applied. Here are two suggested ways.

First, I suggest that the various departments of foreign languages in each of our universities assume their share of responsibility for the training of FL teachers for every level of our educational system, from elementary school to graduate school, and then join hands with their schools of education in doing two things: first, revamping the state education requirements for elementary-school teachers to whatever extent may be necessary in order to provide for the training of highly qualified FLES teachers; and second, setting up a model FL program, from kindergarten to grade 12, in their university's laboratory school. If the university has no laboratory school, then an effort should be made to work with a local public school. This kind of model program cannot be achieved overnight, of course. It will require a long-range plan, and it will require a great deal of energy and statesmanship and good will. There will be no room for rivalries between languages. In order to work toward model programs from kindergarten to grade 12 in all languages it will probably be necessary for the foreign-language departments to agree on a model program first in only one language. And the far-sighted teacher of Russian will recognize that a successful twelve-year program in French or Spanish can only bring the day nearer when there will also be a successful twelve-year program in Russian.

My second big suggestion is one that I have already talked about at the United States Office of Education, and our conference this weekend inspires me to go back and talk about it again. I know of nothing that would spread the new knowledge of effective teaching methods more rapidly than a series of demonstration films made at periodic intervals in an actual class in each language and at each level. Such films would not only show in detail just how the new teaching methods are used. By showing the progress of real pupils in a real course they would also demonstrate just how effective the new methods are. These films could be used not only in foreign-language methods courses but also in the training of graduate teaching assistants, and above all in the in-service training of elementary- and high-school teachers.

Now, after all the references I have made to French and German and Spanish, I imagine some of you are wondering why my talk was announced as "The Teaching of Russian in America." Actually I have been talking about the teaching of Russian the whole time, because the fate of Russian is closely bound up with the fate of all other modern-language teaching. As newcomers in the foreign-language field, whose future development is now assured by the importance of Russian as a world language, we teachers of Russian have an opportunity to display a kind of statesmanship that has all too often been lacking among our colleagues in French and German and Spanish. I know of one school in a university town where a full-scale FLES program in French was ready to be introduced within a week, and it was blocked at the last minute and finally abandoned because of opposition stirred up by the Spanish teachers in the community, who insisted that equality be maintained between French and Spanish. The situation might, of course, have been reversed--and I am afraid that we teachers of Russian cannot be too smugly critical of either group. How many of us are really working for an adequate foreign-language program in our schools, and how many of us are merely trying to build up our own petty classroom empire at the expense of French or Spanish or Latin?

Let us get away from the notion that foreign-language enrollments are a kind of pie in which the size of the slice that goes to Russian or French will depend on how much can be taken away from German or Spanish. The great problem today in all foreign languages is not lack of enrollment. It is lack of well-qualified teachers, well-organized courses of study, and satisfactory teaching materials. Those of us who are teachers of Russian have a unique opportunity to take the lead in bringing all foreign-language teachers closer together, so that we can learn from each other's experience and work together for the new goals in foreign-language teaching that our country can no longer afford to ignore.